

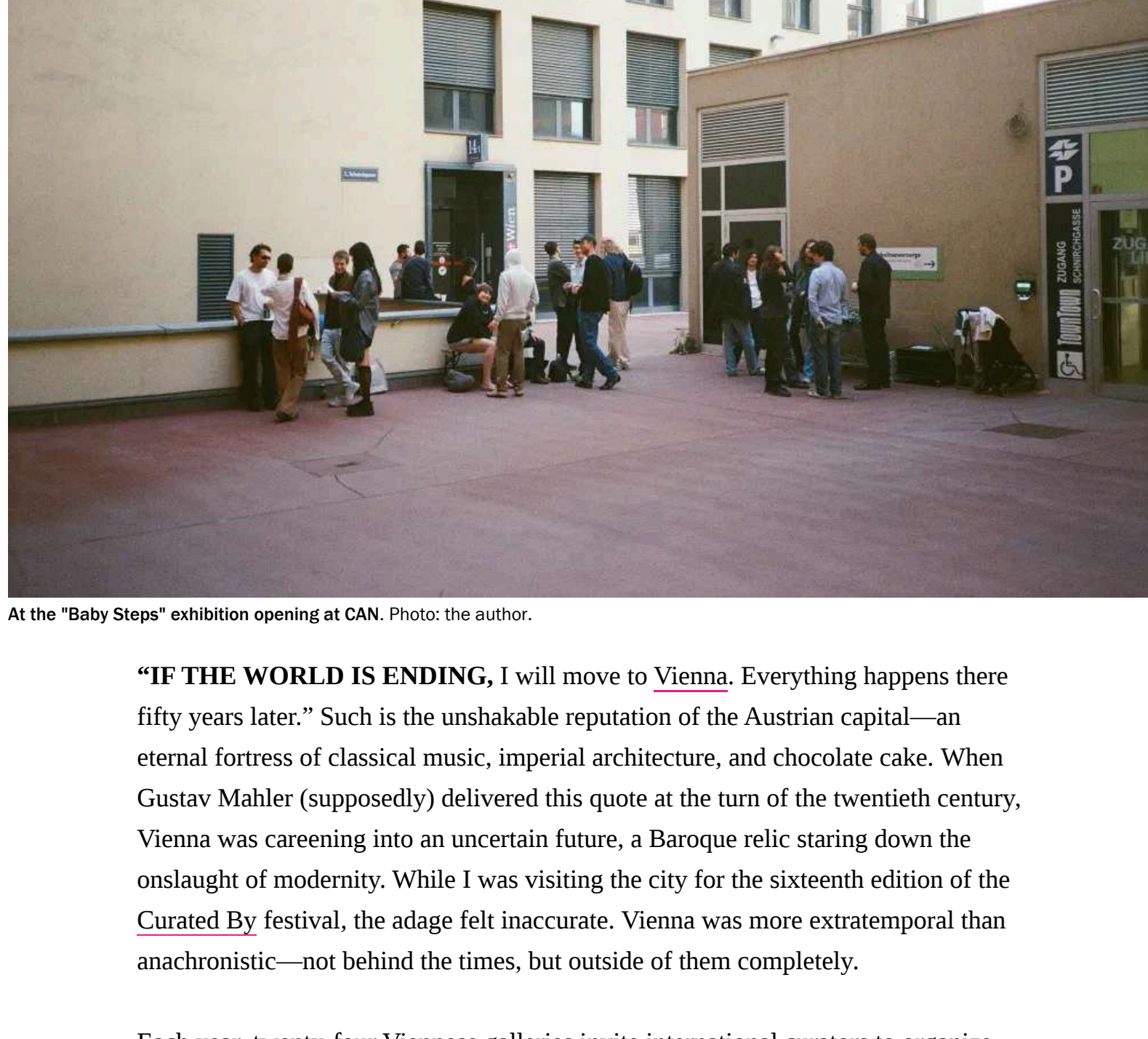


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## TELEPATHY CURATING

Around Vienna's Curated By festival  
By Theo Beld 文  
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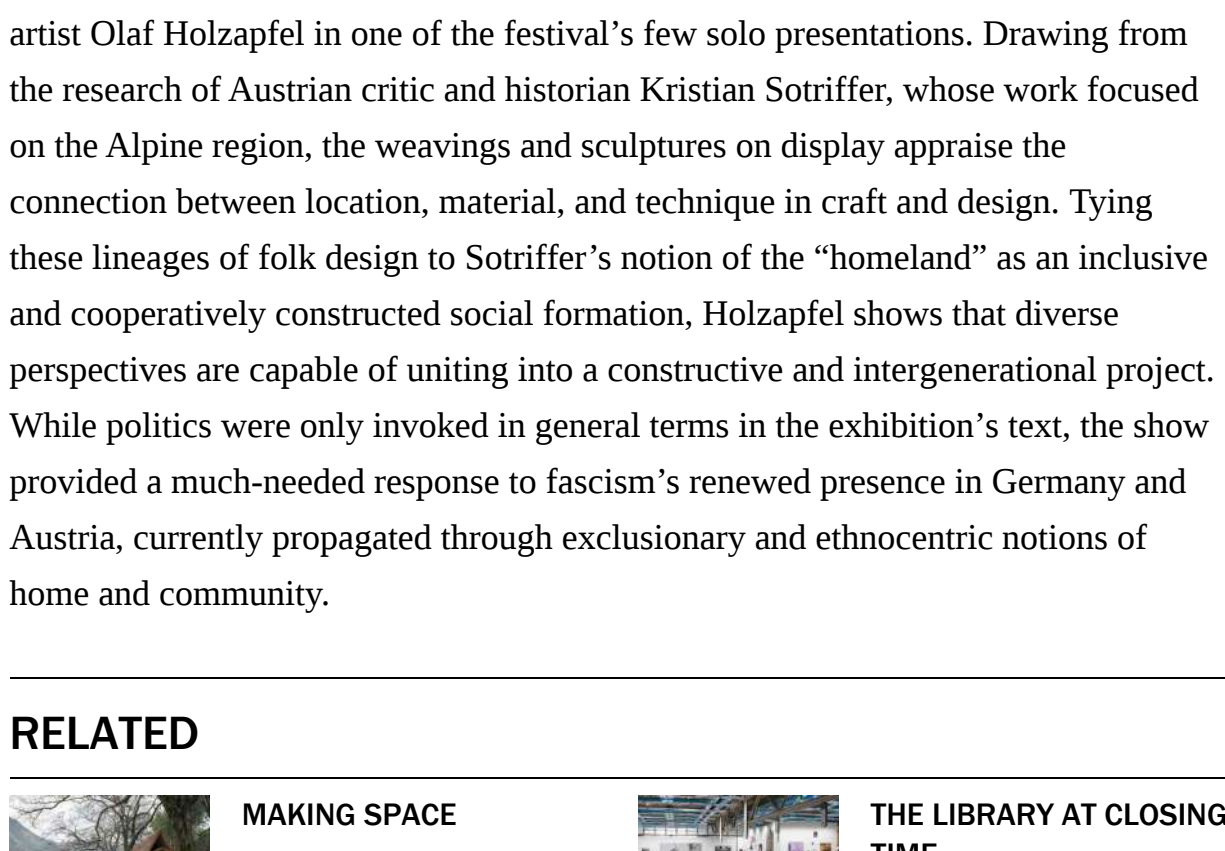


At the "Baby Steps" exhibition opening at CAN. Photo: the author.

**"IF THE WORLD IS ENDING, I will move to Vienna.** Everything happens there fifty years later." Such is the unshakable reputation of the Austrian capital—an eternal fortress of classical music, imperial architecture, and chocolate cake. When Gustav Mahler (supposedly) delivered this quote at the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna was careening into an uncertain future, a Baroque relic staring down the onslaught of modernity. While I was visiting the city for the sixteenth edition of the Curated By festival, the adage felt inaccurate. Vienna was more extratemporal than anachronistic—not behind the times, but outside of them completely.

Each year, twenty-four Viennese galleries invite international curators to organize exhibitions in their spaces, with all responding to a central theme set by the festival. Reflecting on our era of polycrisis and sleep-psychosis, the 2025 edition, "Fragmented Subjectivity," took both title and inspiration from the postmodern theories of Fredric Jameson. In a commissioned essay expounding on the choice, art historian Sophia Roxane Rohwetter invokes the contemporary subject's fractured understanding of self, distracted interaction with the world, and "insecurity about one's place during periodic innovation." Art, according to Rohwetter, offers a refuge to explore the negative manifestations of "fragmentation and alienation," revealing pathways toward connection and clarity in a "time of disaster." The theme felt a little incongruous: postmodern subjectivity in a long-unsundered metropole.

Participating galleries adopted the concept loosely, reserving the right to reject or amend its presuppositions as needed. Two hazily defined camps emerged: One set chose to engage "fragmented subjectivities" through traditionally conceived exhibitions with clear curatorial projects, while another embraced the disjunction, organizing shows intuitively through networks of influence and association.



The Curated By afterparty. Photo: the author.

An exhibition at Christine König Galerie organized by Kathleen Reinhardt, current director of the Georg Kolbe Museum in Berlin and curator of the German pavilion at the next Venice Biennale, felt firmly in the first group, featuring Berlin-based artist Olaf Holzapfel in one of the festival's few solo presentations. Drawing from the research of Austrian critic and historian Kristian Sottriffer, whose work focused on the Alpine region, the weavings and sculptures on display appraise the connection between location, material, and technique in craft and design. Tying these lineages of folk design to Sottriffer's notion of the "homeland" as an inclusive and cooperatively constructed social formation, Holzapfel shows that diverse perspectives are capable of uniting into a constructive and intergenerational project. While politics were only invoked in general terms in the exhibition's text, the show provided a much-needed response to fascism's renewed presence in Germany and Austria, currently propagated through exclusionary and ethnocentric notions of home and community.

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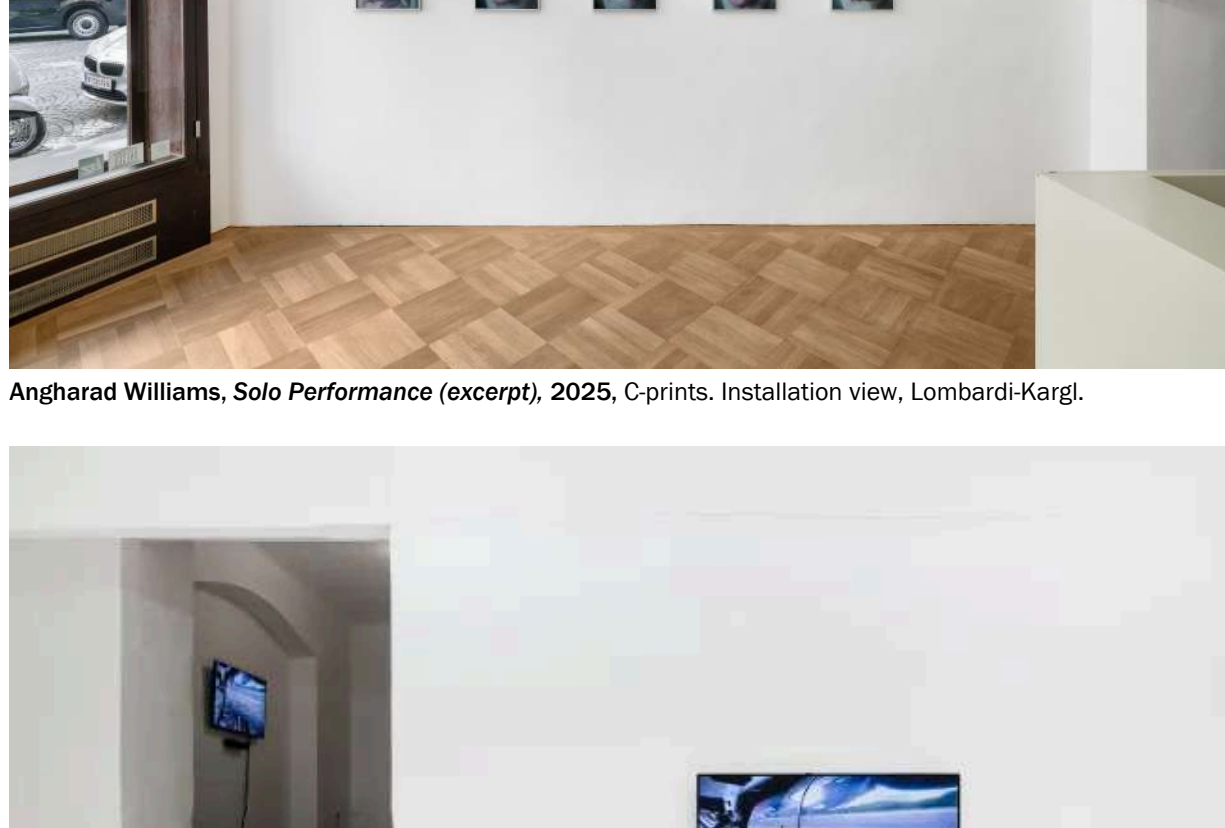


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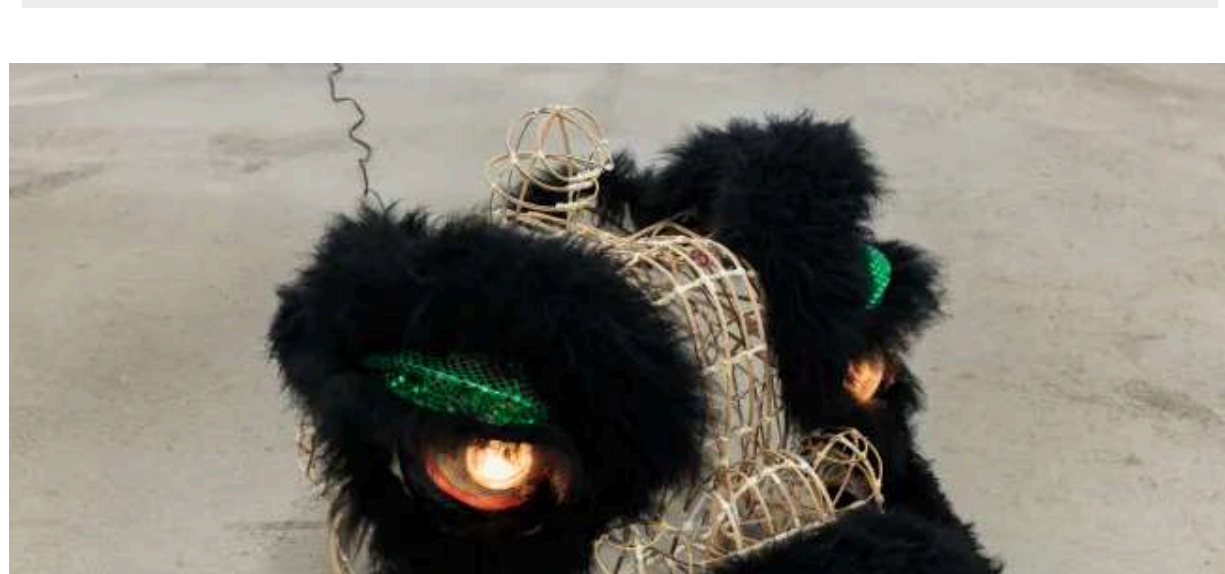
At Lombardi-Kargl, curator Kathrin Benetele—incoming director of Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg—united artists Henri Chopin, Kota Gawashell, Nour Mobarak, and Angharad Williams in a show centered on speech, and the lapses of understanding that pervade our language. The exchange between the moving-image work of Chopin—clicking, popping, breathy concerts of sound poetry—and Gawashell's video *Blurry Middle Distance*, 2025, was particularly enchanting, with both foregrounding the partial, interrupted, or incomplete thoughts and utterances that punctuate the otherwise hazy blur of memory. In Benetele's exhibition, personal history is characterized by these moments, instances of failed recognition and clarity inaccessible to others, carried on as the dark matter of our past interactions.



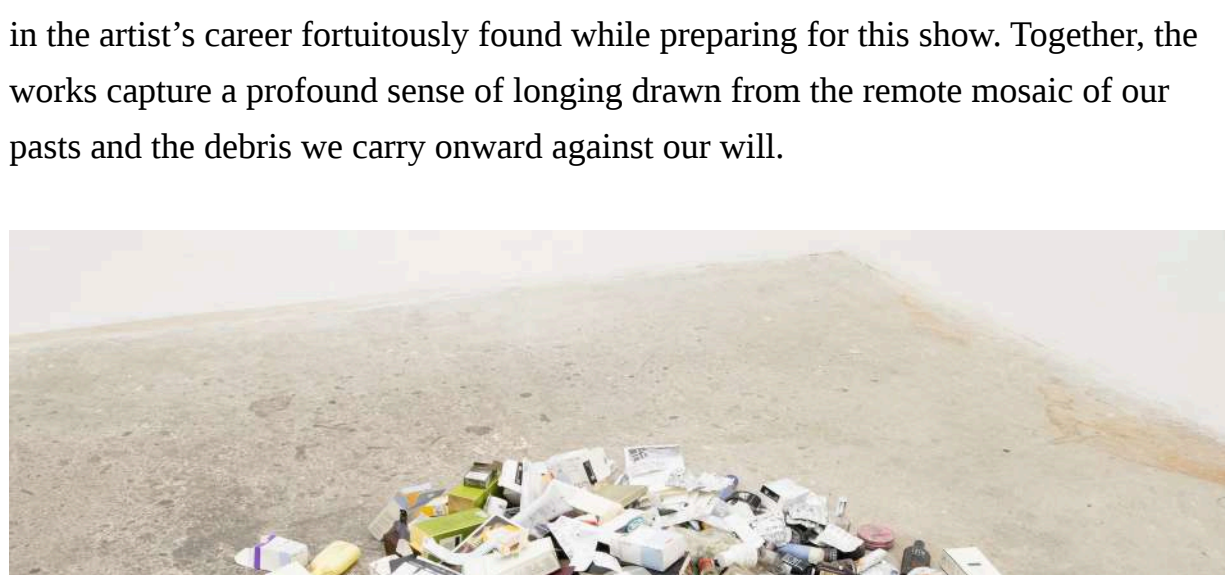
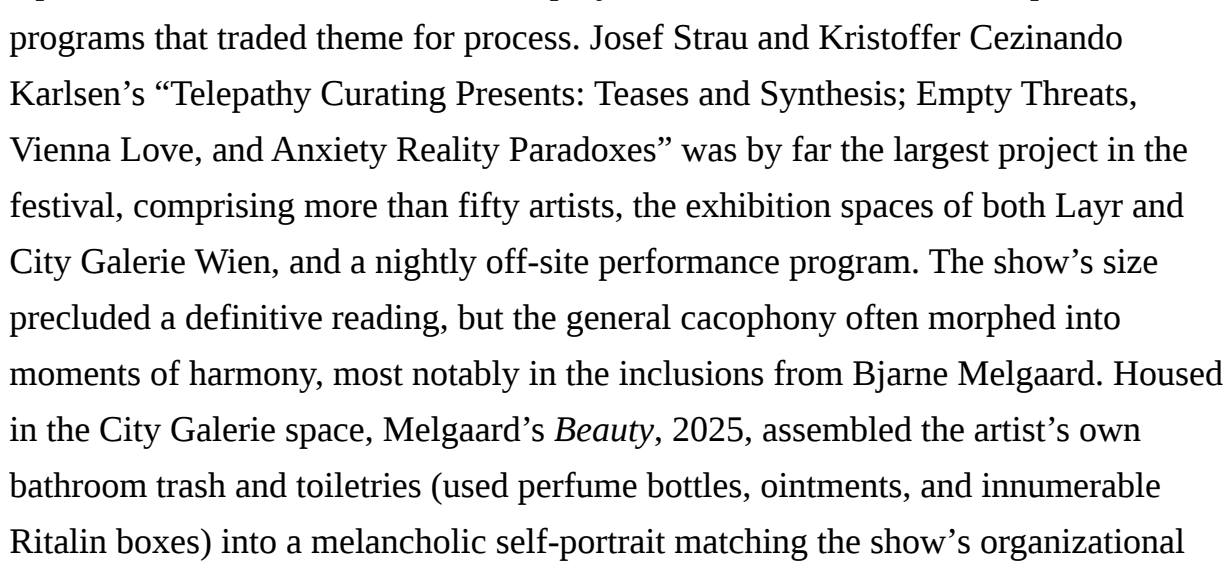
Fondazione in Between Art Film editor Bianca Stoppani's show at Gianni Marziani included the notable pairing of Morag Keil's *Passive Aggressive*, 2018, a six-screen video installation examining the bowels of parked motorcycles on the streets of Berlin, and Bianca Hlywa's *The Image of the Tide*, 2017, a dead SCOBY in a plastic bag swung from a ceiling fan motor. While the show ostensibly examines the space outside of hegemonic theories of the world, it was strongest in its droll manipulation of expectation and scale. Much like the swirling mass of dead yeast spinning at the center of the gallery, the viewer is strung along, their attention channeled into a hilariously repetitive circuit of winced screens.

Straddling the middle ground between thesis- and artist-driven curating was Reilly Davidson's "Duree" at Dawid Radziszewski: On the walls, the haunting, austere canvases of Chaeheun Park and Tatjana Danneberg resonated in their shared invocations of collected and reappropriated imagery. On the floor, Mira Mamm's twin ceremonial lion heads stole the show. The figures respond deftly to collective constructions of time (such heads are used in New Year's dances across Asia), with their partially exposed wood skeletons suggesting that there is room to deconstruct and redesign our relationships to such phenomena.

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Apart from these rather conventional projects stood several outliers, experimental programs that traded theme for process. Josef Strau and Kristoffer Cezinando Karlsen's "Telepathy Curating Presents: Teases and Synthesis; Empty Threats, Vienna Love, and Anxiety Reality Paradoxes" was by far the largest project in the festival, comprising more than fifty artists, the exhibition spaces of both Layr and City Galerie Wien, and a nightly off-site performance program. The show's size precluded a definitive reading, but the general cacophony often morphed into moments of harmony, most notably in the inclusions from Bjarne Meigaard. Housed in the City Galerie space, Meigaard's *Beauty*, 2025, assembled the artist's own bathroom trash and toiletries (used perfume bottles, ointments, and innumerable Ritalin boxes) into a melancholic self-portrait matching the show's organizational excess. Strewn on the floor in one large pile, it sat below three untitled drawings from the artist's 1997 solo show at the Stedelijk Museum, relics from a turning point in the artist's career fortuitously found while preparing for this show. Together, the works capture a profound sense of longing drawn from the remote mosaic of our pasts and the debris we carry onward against our will.

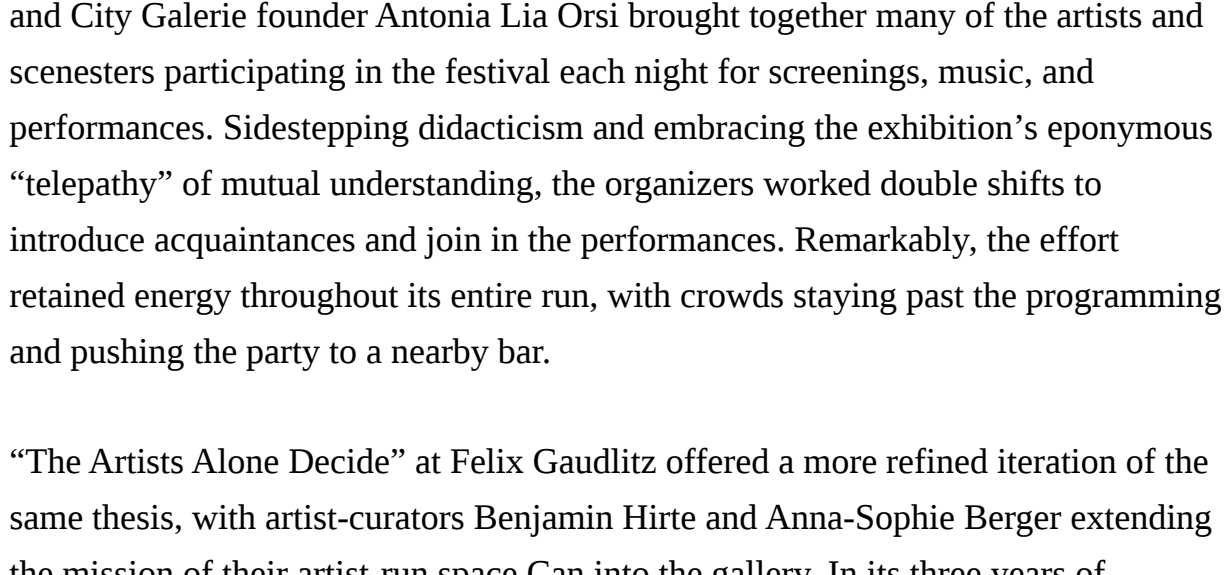


In the show's third location, a performance program organized by Strau, Karlsen, and City Galerie founder Antonia Lia Orsi brought together many of the artists and scenesters participating in the festival each night for screenings, music, and performances. Sidestepping didacticism and embracing the exhibition's eponymous "telepathy" of mutual understanding, the organizers worked double shifts to introduce acquaintances and join in the performances. Remarkably, the effort retained energy throughout its entire run, with crowds staying past the programming and pushing the party to a nearby bar.



"The Artists Alone Decide" at Felix Gauditz offered a more refined iteration of the same thesis, with artist-curators Benjamin Hirte and Anna-Sophie Berger extending the mission of their artist-run space Can into the gallery. In its three years of operation, the space has invited artists to organize exhibitions with relative freedom, with Hirte and Berger working to facilitate rather than arbitrate collaborators' visions. The duo paired contributors through networks of shared interest, drawing on personal histories and relationships with artists to form conversations across the space. Take, for instance, Teak Ramos's seven-silk-on-board composition *Something Borrowed—Parasol 02*, 2024, and Flora N. Galowitz's drum "to" bass-scored psychedelic hangout video *fraystems featuring Pen's Bungalow (Music for Refreshing the Systems)*, 1998. While working with Berger on a show in Rome in 2021, Ramos shared still images of the Galowitz video as an interesting yet unknown reference. Berger eventually tracked the source down, keeping it close in mind for the subsequent four years before turning the conversation back on Ramos's work. Hans-Christian Lotz's *Untitled*, 2019, hangs between the two pieces, visualizing the ethos: Consisting of a family tree made from aluminum frames most commonly used in workstations and modular construction, it is a representation of the scaffolding of artistic production, the superstructure which supports lines of influence. The piece echoes Hirte and Berger's curatorial principles, claiming that the internal architecture of artmaking can be as affecting as any picture.

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Lurking in the background was Viennacontemporary—Vienna's main art fair, a conventional, commercial operation with a specific focus on Viennese and Eastern European galleries. Since 2022, the fair has offered curated programs, with this year's "STATEMENT: Realities Building" attempting to speak to the same psychological and political anxiety that framed the Curated By presentations. The section included several videos and other time-based works, selected by curator Marcella Beccaria to engage just about every catastrophe of modern life, including "war, violence, authoritarian governments," and the "multiple forms of reality" stemming from algorithmic control of information. Jonas Staal's *Propaganda Theater, Video Study*, 2023, was an exemplary inclusion for the loose theme, and carefully delineated the ways in which such mediated discrimination is in fact a planned and cultivated aspect of our media ecosystem. Drawing from connections between the film industry, the US military, cable television, and legacies of fascist politics in consumer culture, the video highlights the ways fear and disquiet are actively conferred on viewers. Other works felt flat, most notably *CONTROL*, 2018, Armando Lulaj's thirty-five-minute video of a white billboard in Albania. Without any punctum to break up the film's mundanity, it read as a shrug in the face of peril, an inability to speak up and address the crisis invoked by the curatorial text. Facing war, confusion, and anxiety, as diagnosed by Beccaria, is art's best answer. A cheery silence? Visitors answered with a resolute "no." One gallerist I spoke to was unaware the fair featured a curated video program at all. Other familiar faces from the week of openings avoided the "topical" presentation entirely, instead congregating among the bustle of the emerging-galleries section, curated by none other than Antonia Lia Orsi.

Apart from all this temporary programming were Vienna's myriad independent spaces and institutions, the true clinics for healing any perceived crisis in contemporary subjectivity. At Kunstverein Kevin Space, Nancy Lupo's "Disko" produced a shimmering, undulating suite of crystals, metallic fabrics, and mechanically rippling sheets partly inspired by a visit to Greenland's icebergs. Unexpectedly, the press release was an indispensable companion to the show, reproducing an email correspondence between the artist and curator Tosia Leniarska lasting more than a month. In the text, Lupo is given the space to share everything on her mind leading up to the exhibition, and the visitor is enlightened to the full symbolism and significance of the show's many components.

Simultaneous to their show at Felix Gauditz, Hirte and Berger opened "Baby Steps" at Can, showcasing a single slideshow of baby feet by artist Carissa Rodriguez. Its images are subtle and beautiful, taken in mellow light and fuzzy surroundings. Can, a tiny room atop a parking complex in a housing development, feels like the perfect home for the piece. At Hirte and Berger's two shows, one sees the Viennese ecosystem at its best—small, artist-oriented spaces create relationships with local and international artists, then connect them with other like-minded people in Vienna, making the city a hub for generative, non-professionalized exchange. The goal isn't blockbuster exhibitions and sold-out fairs, but the long-lasting and meaningful connections built at the measured pace of a toddler's shuffle.

Curated By exhibitions are on view through October 4, 2025.



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